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SUBJECT: UNCTAD TIPTOES TOWARDS SMALLER CARBON FOOTPRINT

¶1. SUMMARY: The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has answered the call for a carbon-neutral UN by setting for itself a carbon emissions reduction target of 20 percent by ¶2020. A Swiss firm, the Gaia Group, conducted a carbon emissions inventory for UNCTAD, and is advising UNCTAD on options to reduce its emissions. END SUMMARY

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UNCTAD's Carbon Emissions Inventory  
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¶2. On November 9, Mission ECON and EST officers met with Lucas Assuncao of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Pasi Rinne of Gaia Group to discuss UNCTAD's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint. According to Assuncao and Rinne, UNCTAD is ahead of other UN organizations in responding to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's call for a carbon-neutral UN. Using extra-budgetary funds, UNCTAD engaged Gaia, a Swiss-based energy auditing firm, to conduct an emissions inventory. The bulk of UNCTAD's carbon emissions come from business related travel initiated by UNCTAD in Geneva, including travel of guest speakers to UNCTAD events worldwide that is paid for by UNCTAD; not included are expenses of guest experts and delegates that attend UNCTAD meetings at their own expense, and UNCTAD staff commuting. Of the 3,096.89 tons/CO2 emitted by UNCTAD a year, 2,819.09 tons/CO2 or 91.03 percent is from business related travel; the next highest category is heating at 8.21 percent. Of the business related travel emissions, 86 percent is attributed to long-haul travel of 1600 km and over, and 11 percent is attributed to medium haul travel of 500-1600 km.

¶3. According to UN employee regulations, business class air travel is authorized for flights of nine hours or more. Business class travel emits 2.2 times the amount of carbon per capita as coach travel. Although a reduction in business class travel would result in a large reduction in carbon emissions, Assuncao stated that business class travel is a benefit fiercely safeguarded by the UN labor union.

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Mitigating UNCTAD's Carbon Emissions  
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¶4. Given that UNCTAD is not addressing the issue of business class travel, Assuncao is focusing mitigation efforts on replacing travel with direct video conferencing; on energy efficiency within the offices; and on developing an incentive program to encourage low-emissions practices among employees. UNCTAD is not buying any carbon-offsets.

¶5. Assuncao reported that the use of direct video conferencing (DVC) has dramatically increased in the last year, from one or two DVC meetings per month in 2007 to 18 in October 2008 alone. UNCTAD is therefore soliciting donors to fund equipment to expand its DVC capability. Assuncao conceded that while DVC is a great tool for increased communication, he did not expect DVCs to replace the bulk of UNCTAD's travel. Costs for additional video-conference rooms are projected to be USD 20,000 per additional room, with fixed

maintenance costs of USD 40,000 a year, regardless of the number of DVC rooms. Maintenance of the video-conferencing room is provided by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

¶16. UNCTAD leases space from UNOG, and it is working with UNOG management to install motion detectors and other energy saving devices. Finally, UNCTAD is working with an employee group to encourage energy saving practices, such as turning off computers and printers and using video conferences. Assuncao does not have funding to put in place an incentive program to encourage employees to make low-emission choices, but he is raising awareness through dissemination of the emissions inventory and suggestions on carbon savings that everyone can act on.

¶17. Mission officers suggested that the inventory data summary sheet would be more transparent and useful if the travel figure were broken down to show the percentage of emissions for business class travel versus coach class travel, and to add the statistic that "business class travel emits 2.2 times the amount of carbon per capita as coach travel." Such transparent and powerful information might cause some environmentally-minded UNCTAD staff to opt for coach travel even when they are entitled to business class travel.

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Going Forward with UNCTAD Climate Neutrality  
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¶18. The carbon emission inventory is a high priority for UNCTAD, but without regular budgetary funding, UNCTAD must rely upon unpredictable voluntary funding to keep the inventory updated and to invest in carbon emissions reduction measures. UNCTAD is asking

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other Geneva based Missions for contributions and support for this climate neutral initiative. Assuncao estimated that UNCTAD needs USD 130,000 to USD 140,000 per year for three years to fund all its desired investments in new DVC rooms, energy efficient heating and lighting systems, and staff awareness campaigns, and to keep the carbon data current. After the initial three years of investment, Assuncao estimated that costs for UNCTAD to maintain its carbon reduction measures and updated inventory would fall to USD 10,000 to 20,000 per year.

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COMMENT  
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¶19. UNCTAD could cut both costs and carbon emissions by reducing travel, especially business class, but a UN-wide mandate may be needed. An incentive program could be one approach to get staff to voluntarily give up business class travel. For example, employees who opted for coach class could be given an extra day of annual leave and the financial savings achieved from purchase of the less expensive coach class air ticket could be invested in projects that would offset the carbon emissions generated from the coach class air travel.

¶10. UNCTAD has other options to reduce its carbon emissions as well. After the meeting, we learned that UNCTAD has been successful in reducing its biennial number of publications from 225 to 205. Given that each publication requires numerous consultations - necessitating travel - the good news is that this reduction should also have a positive impact on UNCTAD's carbon mitigation program. Additionally, at a November 10 meeting of UNCTAD's working party on UNCTAD's strategic framework and budget, both developing and developed countries demanded that UNCTAD dramatically reduce its number of printed publications and instead rely to the maximum extent possible on electronic dissemination. This decision will also have a positive impact on carbon emissions since UNCTAD's heavy tomes were typically distributed by airmail. Now UNCTAD needs to quantify the carbon reduction impact of these reforms and capture the data in its inventory so that UNCTAD can safeguard the carbon savings.

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